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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted to assess the current state of technology and distance learning awareness and usage in Florida's adult education and community-based programs. Data were gathered through a survey of 350 adult practitioners, literacy providers, community-based organizations and libraries throughout the state (125 responses [36 percent return rate]). Findings of the study included the following: (1) 30 percent of the respondents said they were involved in distance learning, primarily in Crossroads Cafe; (2) 71 percent said that distance learning and alternative education delivery systems can have a positive impact on programs; (3) 73 percent of respondents had computers with more than 16 megabytes of memory, a CD-ROM drive, and a modem; (4) 79 percent had computers at home; (5) only 43 percent of computers for student use had more than 16 megabytes of memory; (6) 17 percent of respondents listed training, staff development, and financial support as their top needs for support services; (7) more than 60 percent of respondents said they would be willing to pay a small fee to attend a technology-based workshop to sharpen their technology skills; and (8) most respondents were confident of their computer skills. Recommendations were made for training to enable individuals to be part of a high-performance learning community that embraces technology and distance learning opportunities, is committed to the idea of sharing knowledge, and supports mentoring and coaching as beneficial to both students and facilitators; and for development of a Technology Support Team and statewide infrastructure that will enable all adult education and literacy administrators, providers, teachers, and students the ability to access information, communicate, and share ideas and learn new ways of solving problems. (The survey instrument is included in the report.) (KC)

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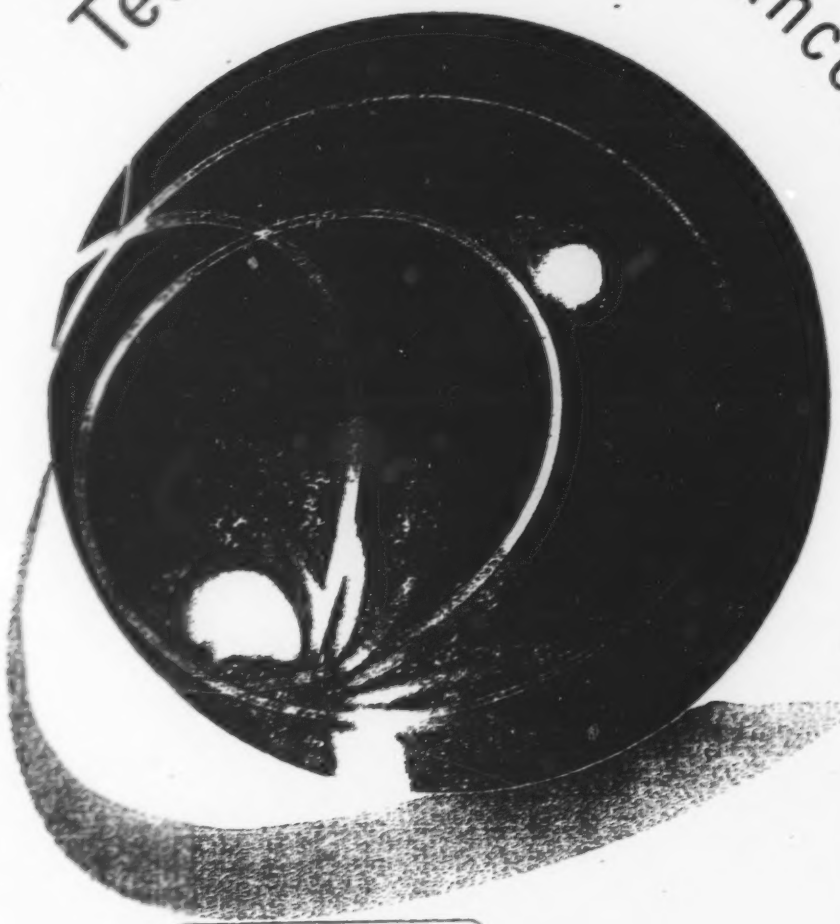
Technology & Distance Learning Survey



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Appreciation goes to the Florida Department of Education and specifically, Leatricia Williams, Program Director for the Division of Workforce Development, whose vision to bring technology and distance learning into Adult Education molded the development of the survey.

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Finally, sincere appreciation goes to the practitioners in adult education, literacy and community-based organizations who took the time from their busy days to complete the survey. Their valuable input will lay the foundation for bringing Florida's Adult Education Community into the 21st Century.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Executive Summary 4

Recommendations 5

Introduction 6

The Survey 7

Putting It All together 10

Appendix 12

- Sample Survey

Table of Contents

Florida Human Resources Development, Inc., 1999.

Executive Summary

The purpose of the Technology and Distance Learning survey was to assess the current state of technology/distance learning awareness and usage in Florida's Adult Education and Community-Based programs. The survey was conducted by the Florida Department of Education in collaboration with Florida Human Resources Development, Inc. Included in this report are key findings and recommendations for technology and distance learning opportunities throughout Florida's Adult Education and Literacy communities.

The Technology and Distance Learning Survey was distributed to approximately 350 adult practitioners, literacy providers, Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and libraries throughout Florida. There were 125 responses, including the CBOs or a return rate of approximately 36%.

Executive Summary

Findings were as follows:

- 30% of the respondents said they were involved in Distance Learning, primarily Crossroads Cafe.
- 71% responded positively that Distance Learning and/or alternative education delivery systems can have a positive impact on programs.
- 73% of respondents had computers with more than 16MB of memory, a CD-ROM drive and modem.
- 79% had computers at home.
- Only 43% of computers for student use had more than 16 MB of memory.
- 17% of respondents listed both Training/Staff Development and Financial Support as the top two needs for support services.
- Over 60% of respondents commented that they would be willing to pay a small fee to attend a technology-based workshop if it meant sharpening their technology skills.
- Only 4% considered themselves "technophobic" (lacking computer confidence). In fact, the majority stated they were either "very confident" or "confident" in their capabilities.

Recommendations

Individuals need to be trained as part of a high performance learning community that

- Embraces technology and distance learning opportunities as a tool of convenience and resource;
- Is committed to the idea of sharing knowledge so the collective "we" will remain well informed;
- Supports mentoring and coaching as beneficial to both the student and the facilitator in transferring highly complex or difficult skills from one person to the other.

Recommendations

Strategic Plans should include the following recommendations:

- Development of a statewide infrastructure that will enable all adult education and literacy administrators, providers, teachers and students the ability to access information, communicate and share ideas and learn new ways of solving problems.

- Creation of a statewide Technology Support Team to be facilitated by the Division of Workforce Development and funded through a grant based out of the Division of Workforce Development. This team will assist adult educators in maintaining current hardware and software recommendations. The Technology Support Team would not only provide technical assistance to adult educators and practitioners but also provide onsite (or regional) training workshops on topics such as:
  - Desktop publishing
  - Internet usage and Ethics
  - Spreadsheets
  - Development of Technology Standards by which all adult educators, teachers, practitioners will be held accountable (the Technology Support Team would offer workshops for skill attainment and other competencies.)

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Literacy is no longer viewed as just comprehension of the "3 R's", but now includes using technology and distance learning to solve real world problems related to the workplace, parenting and family life.

Introduction

Advances in technology have helped redefine the concept of literacy for adults. Literacy is no longer viewed as just comprehension of the "3 R's", but now includes using technology and distance learning to write, draw, find and access information, analyze data, send and receive messages, and solve real world problems related to the workplace, parenting and family life.

Many educators lack the technical skills to access this information for their adult clients. In some cases, the adult and community educators do not have direct link to the information because of a host of local problems, i.e.:

- *Lack of equipment*
- *Lack of knowledge of the benefits*
- *Lack of training*
- *Lack of internet access*

The current demand to meet the learning needs of adults in education and industry is unprecedented. Adult learners, as well as teachers of adult learners, literally demand curriculum that not only stimulates their thinking processes but also allows them to buy-in to the meaning of the instruction. Let's face it, adults only participate in activities they feel will contribute to their life experiences. Furthermore, personal or professional limitations may restrict their ability to participate in traditional instruction or staff development. For this reason, distance learning and other multimedia technologies have become one of the most widely used venues for adult and literacy education in the past three years.

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According to the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) report *Adult Literacy and New Technologies: Tools for a Lifetime*, computer-assisted instruction and distance learning opportunities not only allows learners to proceed at their own rate of speed, but also breaks down geographical barriers that may otherwise limit instruction. Furthermore, the report states, many literacy programs in the country today have barely realized the potential that new technologies can offer.

Distance learning and other multimedia technologies have become one of the most widely used venues for adult and literacy education in the past three years

There is a need for technology assistance and distance learning opportunities in adult and literacy programs in Florida. Luckily, the Florida Department of Education has recognized this opportunity for instruction and is taking the necessary steps to insure that all adult educators in Florida have access to high quality adult and literacy education.

A Technology and Distance Learning Survey was conducted in the Spring of 1999 by Florida Human Resources Development, Inc., a non-profit corporation, to assess the current level of technology usage and distance learning opportunities in Florida. The following pages explain the results of the survey and provide general comments in an attempt to assist the DOE in determining what needs exist in technology and distance learning (DL).

The Survey

The Technology and Distance Learning Survey (Appendix 1) was distributed to approximately 350 adult practitioners, literacy providers, Community Based Organizations and libraries throughout Florida. There were 125 responses, including the CBO's or a return rate of approximately 36%. Although the survey asked to choose the population that best represents their program, the majority of the respondents chose more than one population. Figure 1 reveals the population make up of the respondents.

The 15 item questionnaire was designed to assess the current level of technology usage and distance learning opportunities.

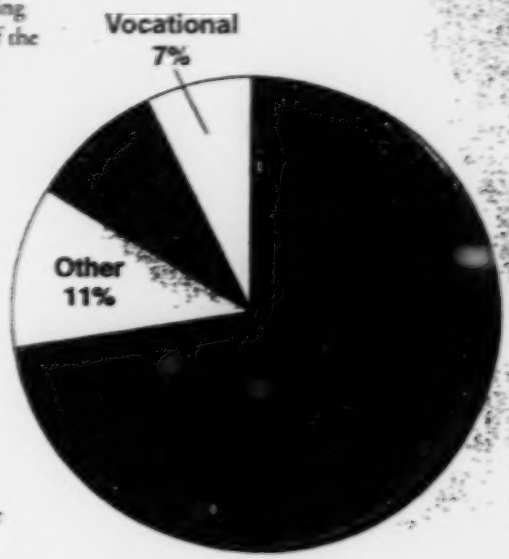

Figure 1
Programs that were represented in this survey.

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The results are as follows:

What Percentage of your Programs are involved in Distance Learning (DL)?

Approximately 30% of the respondents said they were involved in Distance Learning. In fact, they mentioned Crossroads Café as the primary source of instruction. Many of the respondents commented that they are in the process of establishing partnerships with local community colleges but have only been able to provide DL for staff meetings only.

When asked if Distance Learning and/or alternative education delivery systems can have a positive impact on their program, 71% responded positively. Some comments included:

"Providing additional instructional options that may allow students to be reached that otherwise would not be is considered the principal benefit"

"Is (Distance Learning) can facilitate continuous education and other self improvements in a rural area over an hour away from urban and college/university settings"

"In a rural county, transportation is always a problem, distance learning could really help!"

"Alternative education delivery offers flexibility to those learners who have difficult schedules. Distance learning also provides opportunities for us to service learners while they are waiting for tutors."

"We need more flexibility to meet the needs of our students. I don't see how distance learning can have a negative impact."

"Distance learning would enable us to reach a much larger segment of our potential customers."

Although the majority of the comments regarding distance learning were positive, there were some negative responses as well.

Adult educators are concerned that, "With performance-based funding in place, we would need to make sure that the school receive the "credit" for the accomplishments of the learner. Others commented that their county is so small, and their staff limited that they couldn't handle any additional responsibilities that DL might provide.

Figure 2
Support services that respondents listed as necessary for DL to be successful.

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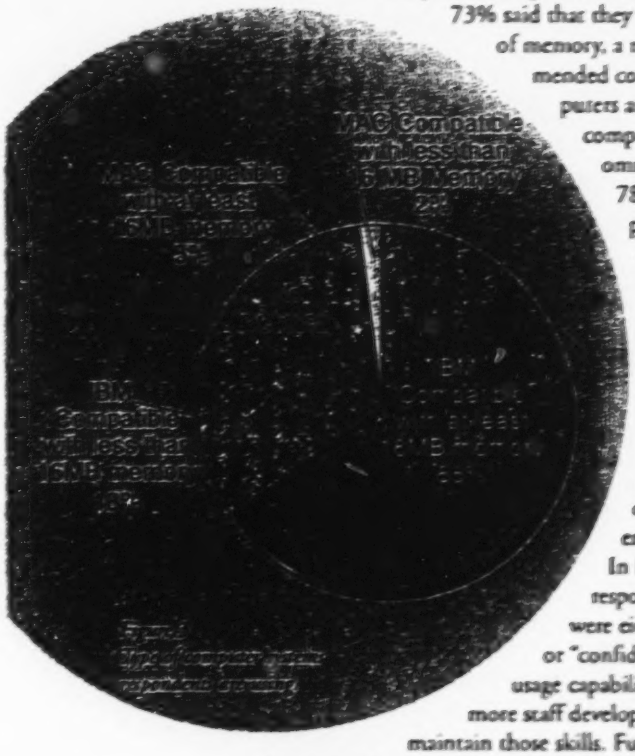
Support Services

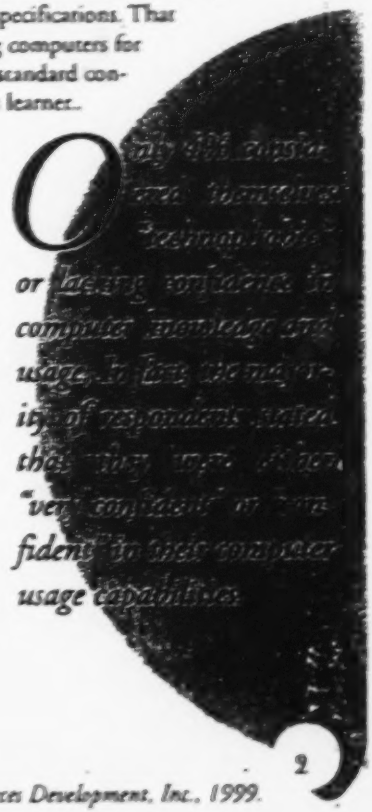
When asked to list the support services that would be necessary in order for DL to be successful, 17% of the respondents listed both Training/Staff Development and Financial support as the top 2 services (See Figure 2). Many comments on the survey suggested that Training and Staff Development opportunities be offered at future conferences and other regional meetings. In fact, the majority of respondents even stated that they would pay a small fee to attend technology-based workshops.

Current Computer Usage

In an era of "haves and have nots", we were interested in determining what types of computer configurations each respondent had at their disposal. Surprisingly, 73% said that they had a computer at home with more than 16 MB of memory, a modem and CD-ROM capabilities (the recommended configuration for Internet access). 79% had computers at work with the same configuration, but it was computers available for student usage that lacked recommended specifications for today's learner. While 78% of the respondents stated that they had computers available for student use, only 43% of those computers had greater than 16 MB of memory with the other noted specifications. That leaves 57% of existing computers for student use with sub standard configurations for today's learner..



Only 4% considered themselves "technophobic" or lacking confidence in computer knowledge and usage. In fact, the majority of respondents stated that they were either "very confident" or "confident" in their computer usage capabilities. They just wanted more staff development opportunities to maintain those skills. Further, as stated earlier, the respondents stated that financial support was a primary support service that needed to be addressed. Not only to purchase the equipment and software but to create a technology support team or maintenance team to ensure that the equipment and software are kept up to date. As many providers serve their community members where they are rather than



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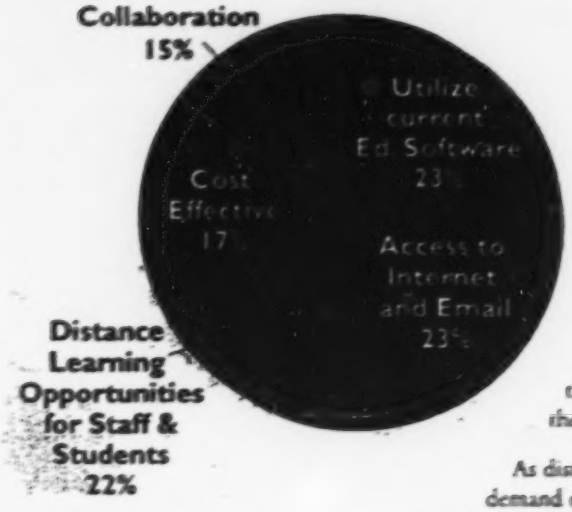

Figure 4
Respondents' reasons to have access to computers in Adult Education

them coming to the adult education center, some respondents noted that up to date technology was essential for home-bound learners who could not attend otherwise traditional classes.

When asked "Why I should have access to computers in Adult Education" all 5 options (Access to Internet and Email, Distance Learning Opportunities for Staff and Students, Utilize current educational software, collaboration, and cost effective) were rated comparatively the same.

As distance learning becomes more accessible and the demand continues to grow, we wanted to know exactly what respondents thought distance learning was. Interestingly enough, 29% of respondents stated that they thought distance learning was just the use of a TV monitor in a classroom. 31% stated that taking a class on the Internet was distance learning while the remaining 40% explained it was the use of VCRs and correspondence courses. By the way, all the responses were correct as a definition of distance learning.

Putting it all together: Recommendations

So what does it all mean? Naisbitt suggests that the world of the future will be dominated by electronic communication and distance learning opportunities; communication and distance learning that moves us to a world of both high tech and high touch. In order for the citizenry of Florida to be actively involved in this world of the future, it is essential that our adults be skilled in using various technology-based tools to access information while at the same time have competencies needed to function in the more traditional world. We can no longer develop programs and services based on the premise that everyone learns at the same pace, learns in the same manner, learns best on their own, and can make connections from abstractions without support and guidance.

Individuals need to be trained as part of a high performance learning community that:

- Embraces technology and distance learning opportunities as a tool of convenience and resource;
- Is committed to the idea of sharing knowledge so the collective "we" will remain well informed;

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- Supports mentoring and coaching as beneficial to both the student and the facilitator in transferring highly complex or difficult skills from one person to the other.

The following recommendations will help meet the needs of adult and literacy educators in Florida.

- Development of a statewide infrastructure that will enable all adult education and literacy administrators, providers, teachers and students the ability to access information, communicate and share ideas and learn new ways of solving problems.
- Creation of a statewide Technology Support Team to be facilitated by the Division of Workforce Development and funded through a grant based out of the Division of Workforce Development. This team will assist adult educators in maintaining current hardware and software recommendations.

The Technology Support Team would not only provide technical assistance to adult educators and practitioners but also provide onsite (or regional) training workshops on topics such as:

- Desktop publishing
- Internet usage and Ethics
- Spreadsheets
- Development of a technology plan for all adult education centers.
- Development of Technology Standards by which all adult educators, teachers, practitioners will be held accountable (the Technology Support Team would offer workshops for skill attainment and other competencies.)

Development of a statewide infrastructure that will enable all adult education and literacy administrators, providers, teachers and students the ability to access information, communicate and share ideas and learn new ways of solving problems.

Everything from the way we work or play to the way we manage our daily lives is being changed rapidly by information technologies. The USDOE Office of Research & Improvement reports that 60% of today's jobs put workers in front of computers. Unfortunately, technologies are changing so rapidly that only 20% of these individuals have the skills needed to use the technology. The need is there for technology and distance learning opportunities. Florida's adult education and literacy programs could continue to grow positively as long as we enter the information society with our computers in shape and our skills enhanced.

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Appendix

Sample Survey

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Ronald Froman
Executive Director

Adult Education Technology/Distance Learning Survey

Date: _____ Region: _____

Distance learning/ and Alternative Educational Delivery Systems include any educational services that offer non-traditional instructional formats. For example, learners may attend a class once a week, but do most of their learning at home using video, television or the Internet. Another example of non-traditional learning structures might include video check-out for learners who visit a laboratory or meet with a tutor for instructional help when necessary.

Identify the program which best describes your student population.

___ ABE ____ AHS ___ ESOL ___ GED ___ Vocational ___ Other: _____

Please complete this survey and return using the Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope to Ron Froman by February 25, 1999.

Florida Human Resources Development, Inc. /Technology & Distance Learning Survey 816 Leopard Trail Winter Springs, Florida 32708. For questions regarding this survey, please call (407) 699-9622.

QUESTION	YES	NO
1. Are you involved with a program that currently offers distance learning services for adult education learners? **If yes**, please describe the distance learning programs provided.		
2. Do you feel distance learning and/or alternative education delivery systems can have a positive impact on your program? **Briefly explain your answer** (why or why not?)		

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QUESTION	YES	NO
3. In your program, what support services would be necessary for distance/alternative adult education delivery systems to be successful? **(Circle all that apply)** **Training and Staff Development** **Technical Support** **Financial Support** **Information Support** **Audio Tapes** **Video Tapes** **Satellite Classes** (one-way) **Interactive Video** (two-way)		
4. Do you own a personal computer?		
5. Do **you** use a computer at work? Please identify the type that most describes your system. **(Check all that apply)** ___ IBM or compatible ___ Macintosh ___ <16MB RAM ___ >16 MB RAM ___ modem ___ no modem ___ CD-ROM ___ No CD-ROM ___ < 1GB Hardrive ___ > 1 GB Hardrive		
6. Do you have computers for student use? How many? Quantity _____ Please identify the types of computers you have for student use **Quantity Make** **Modem** **<16mb >16MB** _____ IBM or compatible _____ _____ _____ _____ Macintosh _____ _____ _____		
7. Many new computer users are apprehensive identifying and sharing with others their current level of computer proficiency. This fear is called "technophobia". Would you consider yourself **technophobic**?" **On a scale from (1) – (5) , with (1) being "Very Confident" and (5) being "Downright Frightened", how would you rate your current computer competency.** ___ (1) very confident! ___ (2) confident ___ (3) somewhat confident ___ (4) not very confident ___ (5) downright frightened!		
8. Have you completed any computer training classes? If yes, please check all that apply: ___Word Processing ___ Database ___ Spreadsheet ___ Powerpoint ___ Intro to computer ___ Internet		

Florida Human Resources Development, Inc.
Adult Education Technology/Distance Learning Survey

QUESTION	YES	NO
9. If workshops were offered at Adult Education conferences in those programs previously listed would you be willing to pay a small fee to attend?		
10. Did you know ACE of Florida has a Web Site on the Internet?		
11. If yes, have you visited the ACE of Florida Web Site?		
12. What was the purpose of your visit to the ACE of Florida Web Site? (Check all that apply) ___ Gather information on upcoming staff development opportunities and conferences ___ Ask the "Help Desk" a question ___ Read or printout copies of the Task Force Technical Assistance Papers ___ Find helpful links to other valuable resources on the Internet ___ To retrieve information from the current Legislative Session ___ Other _____		

CHECK ALL THAT APPLY

13. (If you do not have a computer at work) Please identify the reason most likely attributed to the fact that you do not have a computer at work.

___ Economic Reasons
___ Lack money for Internet access
___ Don't feel the need for a computer
___ Lack money for training
___ Lack Computer Training
___ Other

14. Identify the reasons you feel are important to having access to computers in Adult Education.

___ Access to the Internet and E-mail
___ Distance learning opportunities for staff and students
___ To utilize current ABE, ESOL, GED and other software
___ Collaboration across geographical and language boundaries
___ Cost effective (interactive programs limit the need for one on one tutoring

CHECK ALL THAT APPLY
15. How would you define Distance Learning?
___ When I'm in a room with other students and the class is broadcast over TV monitors. The instructor may or may not be physically present in my classroom, but may be present at a location on the TV monitor. (Also known as Interactive video, Satellite video, or Video-conferencing)
___ Taking a class over the Internet. I can access my the assignments on my own time, in the privacy of my own home or office.
___ Correspondence course through the mail. (i.e., Dale Carnegie, etc.)
___ Having the opportunity to check out materials (video-tapes, VCRs, WebTV sets) which allow me to learn new skills in the comfort of my own home.

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey.

If you would like to receive a copy of the Technology/Distance Learning Survey results, please provide the following information:

Name:

Address:

Phone and Fax:

E-Mail: